



CAMPUS
MINISTRY
TODAY

MESSAGE PREPARATION TOOL

created by
Tyler Ellis

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You don't have to be a golfer to understand the phrase "par for the course." We use this saying to describe what can be expected in a given situation. For example, cavities don't surprise dentists, counter-offers don't surprise realtors, tune-ups don't surprise mechanics, and storms don't surprise weather forecasters. Every career under the sun has common tasks that come with the territory. So professionals do well to master those tasks and continue to learn how to do their jobs as effectively as possible.

It's no different for those of us who direct ministries on a campus or in a church. Just as surely as drinking coffee and eating pizza is par for the course, so too is preparing sermons and Bibles studies week in and week out. In fact, many of us desire to teach students to do the same. We do this in partnership with the Holy Spirit in order to bring about change in the hearts and lives of college students. All the more reason for us to learn how to efficiently prepare a worthwhile message that is true to God's Word.

For this reason, I was determined to create a tool that would serve as a template that could be used to help prepare a Bible message no matter what the text or topic. Many, but not all, of the principles I've included in this tool come straight from Andy Stanley's excellent book, *Communicating for a Change*, which I highly recommend.

Here you'll find a helpful outline to follow, things to look for in the text, questions to consider for gaining traction, and lots of tips and suggestions to incorporate creativity and life application.

Whether you're the one about to teach or you're training an intern or student leader to teach, just print this document each time a lessons needs to be prepared.

Before you begin, first answer the following four questions regarding your upcoming message:

1. What date and time will you give this message?
2. At what location will you give this message?
3. Who is your audience?
4. Has the topic and/or text of your message already been determined? If so, what is it?

Step 1: Begin with prayer

Suggested Topics to Pray About:

- Search your soul and confess your sins.
- Ask the Lord to bless your preparation process with the wisdom and discernment to determine what to emphasize and what not to emphasize, the clarity and creativity to communicate well, and the passion and conviction to persuade others.
- Pray for guidance over specifics such as the scriptures you select, the stories you tell, the illustrations you give, the props you use, etc.
- Pray for yourself and your audience to understand their context and needs; that God's Spirit would comfort, challenge, and convict listeners to action.
- If any other topics come to mind include them here:

Step 2: Select a title or one-point statement

Throughout the entire message preparation stage, jot down—here or on a whiteboard—keywords and ideas as they come to you. Later on, cross out the ones you dislike and circle the ones you like.

Based on keywords and ideas listed above, try to articulate potential titles or one-point statements. Again, cross out the ones you dislike and circle the ones you like.

Examples of one-point statements:

- “God uses imperfect people.”
- “Purity paves the way to intimacy.”
- “Good people don’t go to heaven; forgiven people do.”
- “To whom shall we go?”

Step 3: Develop your “Me” section (a.k.a. Orientation)

Introducing yourself is especially important when in front of crowds who don’t know you. Even if most of your audience does know you, there are bound to be first-time guests who don’t.

What things might you share to help orient your audience to who you are and what you’re about?

Step 4: Develop your “We” section (a.k.a. Identification)

This is your chance to introduce the topic of your message and assure the audience of its relevance. It’s important to establish some emotional common ground regarding the topic and something they feel. You need to raise awareness of a past, present, or future need. Make them want the answer. You need to select either a question, a tension, or a mystery that you plan to address.

Questions to help you develop the introduction of your message:

- What question am I answering?
- What can I do to get my audience to want to know the answer?
- Or, what tension will this message resolve?
- What can I do to make my audience feel that tension?
- Or, what mystery does this message solve?
- What can I do to make my audience want a solution?

Next, it will be helpful to articulate a transition statement from the “We” section to the “God” section. Examples of transition statements:

- “Well, the good news is, we’re not the first people to struggle with this. The people in Jesus’ day did as well. Turn with me to...”
- “The good news is, we’re not the first people to have doubts about God’s goodness. King David did as well. Turn with me to...”
- “God must have known we would struggle with this because Jesus addressed this very issue one afternoon on his way to...”

Step 5: Develop your “God” section (a.k.a. Illumination)

This is the main part of your message where you introduce biblical truth, God’s take on the subject, and a solution to the question, tension, or mystery you raised.

If you select a topic before a text, ask these questions:

- What, if anything, does the Bible say about this?
- If nothing, why?
- Who in the scriptures faced a situation that forced them to interface with this topic or idea?
- What did they do and what didn’t they do that I might have expected them to do?
- Did Jesus ever address this topic directly or indirectly?
- When you come across an uncomfortable truth, ask, “Why would a God who claims to love us, and demonstrated His love, say such a thing?”

Potential scripture passages:

Throughout the entire message preparation stage, jot down potential scripture passages as they come to you.

Things to look for in the main scripture passage:

- What it says about God:
- What it says about people:
- What it says about Satan:
- What it says about [your topic]:
- Commands to obey:
- Examples to follow:
- Pitfalls to avoid:
- Promises to trust:

Tips and ideas for navigating through the text:

- Have the audience turn to only one passage. Put the rest on the screen.
- Don't read long sections without making comments.
- Highlight and explain certain words.
- Voice your honest frustration about the text.
- Deliberately (and playfully) read the text wrong to get your audience's attention, or use a word that means the opposite. After pausing, emphasize the correct word(s).
- Have the audience read certain words out loud. e.g., "For the truth will make you... What? Say it with me... FREE."

What related BOOKS come to mind that might offer insight on the passage?

What related STORIES come to mind that might enhance your message?

What related ILLUSTRATIONS come to mind that might enhance your message?

What related PROPS (or creative elements) come to mind that might enhance your message?

Examples of props and creative elements:

- Visual aids: a map, a slingshot, a suitcase, stuff on stage with a sheet over it, wearing a costume.
- Creative elements: interviews (live or recorded), movie clips, bringing people on stage, skits, having someone draw or paint during your message, top ten lists, trivia, etc.

When you get stuck in preparation, pray through this checklist of questions:

- What do they need to know? (Information)
- Why do they need to know it? (Motivation) i.e., What will happen to the person who never discovers the truth or principle you're addressing? What is at stake for them?
- What do they need to do? (Application). Be specific. Be creative. For example, don't say "pray" or "pray every day." Instead, say "begin the next seven days with prayer."
- Why do they need to do it? (Inspiration). Inspire them to action. What is at stake if they don't do it? e.g., "Imagine what would happen if each of us went to work tomorrow with a renewed commitment to serve those who usually serve us." Or, "Imagine our joy if we wrote a thank you note to the person who brought us to Christ."
- What can I do to help them remember? (Reiteration). A memory card, a magnet, an assignment or experiment, etc.

Step 6: Develop your “You” section (a.k.a. Application)

This is the part of your message where you extend a challenge on a personal level. Here are some ideas that might help:

Address the groups in the “We” section:

- “How does this apply to me?”
- “How does this apply to relationships (family, friends, boy/girlfriends, roommates, etc.)?”
- “How does this apply to the ministry (or the church)?”
- “How does this apply to relationships with those outside the faith?”
- “How does this apply in the workplace?”

Or address people in various life-stages:

- Teens and college students
- Singles
- Newlyweds
- Parents
- Empty nesters

Or address...

- Believers
- Unbelievers
- The people who are not there. Get the message to them.

Another approach is to share the “So what?” and “Now what?” Suggest something everyone can do. Maybe for a day, a week, or a month. Don’t raise a felt need that you’re not going to cover from God’s word and answer with an application. Don’t over-promise and under-deliver.

Step 7: Develop your “us” section (a.k.a. inspiration)

This is the part of your message where you rejoin the audience with vision-casting of what could be and should be if all were to embrace it. e.g. “Imagine our lives, our church and the world if we applied this truth.” “What would it look like if we embraced this?”

Step 8: Finalize your message with a checklist

- ☐ Type your notes and print a rough draft.
- ☐ Ask others for input.
- ☐ Remove content that is unnecessary, trivial, or redundant filler (Remember, you might keep extra content on file for a future message or series). Be sure to speak within the allotted time.
- ☐ Make PowerPoint slides if you so choose (at least a title slide).
- ☐ Make a handout if you so chose (e.g. Experiments in Digging Deeper, Questions to Journal and/or Discuss, Books to Read, Songs to Listen to, Projects to Do, Topics to Research, etc.)
- ☐ Conduct a survey or interview if you so choose.
- ☐ Do whatever it takes to internalize the message.
- ☐ Consider making plans to record your message so you can listen to it later and critique yourself.